34. The method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 20, wherein the optically encoded bar code is placed on either the front side or the back side of each mail item.

35. The method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 20, wherein the optically encoded bar code is placed in a return address section on each of the plurality of mail items.

36. The system for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 24, further comprising a mail transport device for conveying the plurality of undeliverable items and sorting the undeliverable mail items into a plurality of bins.

37. The system for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 24, wherein the scanner is a hand-held device.

38. The system for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 24, wherein the scanner is a mixed media optical character recognition (MLOCR) device.

REMARKS

This preliminary amendment amends claims 1, 2, 7, 9-11, 16, 18-20, and 20-27 and adds new claims 28-38. The claim amendments are being submitted to more broadly claim the described invention. Applicants believe that they are the first to encode data including identification information on mail items which is then scanned and processed when undeliverable

mail items are returned either to the sender or to a service provider that processes retuned mail for the sender. Therefore, claim 1 has been amended to remove the storing, updating and delivering limitations. These limitations are now recited in new dependent claim 28. Claim 1 has been amended further to remove the limitation "identification of an addressee" in the encoding step. The encoding step now refers more broadly to encoding "identification information" on the mail items. The limitation of "name and current address associated with an intended recipient" is recited in new claim 29.

The limitation recited in claim 2 that the optically encoded barcode is placed in a return address section is unduly limiting, since the barcode can be placed at any scannable location on the mail item. The return address limitation is now recited in new dependent claim 31. New dependent claim 30 recites the limitation that the optically encoded barcode is placed on either the front or back side of the mail item. Claims 11 and 20 have been amended in a similar manner to claim 2. New dependent claims 32-33 and 34-35 recite the same limitations recited in claims 30-31, but depend instead from amended claims 11 and 20, respectively.

System claim 24 has been amended to remove the mail transport device limitation from the independent claim. For large returned mail processing jobs, a mail transport device will greatly improve efficiency in processing the returned items, however, this limitation is not part of the broader invention of scanning encoded data on returned mail items and then processing the scanned information in the encoded data. The mail transport device limitation has been included as new dependent claim 36.

New dependent claims 37 and 38 add further limitations on the scanner used for reading optically encoded data. Claim 37 recites the limitation that the scanner is a hand-held device. Claim 38 recites the limitation that the scanner is an MLOCR device.

Applicants respectfully request acceptance of the above Preliminary Amendment.

Respectfully submitted,

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APPENDIX

1. A method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items comprising the steps of:

encoding data including [an] identification information [of an addressee] on each of [the] a plurality of mail items [in a machine-readable form] prior to mailing;

[mailing the plurality of mail items from a subscriber to the addressees;]

receiving [at a processing location] those items of the plurality of mail items that are returned as being undeliverable; and

scanning and processing the encoded data [stored] on the [received] items of undeliverable mail [and storing the data in an application server database;

updating the read data to reflect a correct current address of each intended recipient of the items of returned mail; and

delivering the updated data to the subscriber in electronic form for use in updating the address files of the subscriber].

2. The method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 1 wherein the step of encoding data includes placing an optically encoded barcode [in a return address section of] on each of the plurality of mail items.

7. The method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 1 wherein the step of scanning the encoded data [stored] on the [received] undeliverable mail includes reading an optically encoded barcode on each item and decoding the barcode to

determine [a name and current address] the identification information associated with an intended recipient of the item.

9. The method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 8 further comprising the step of transmitting the generated output file to a mailing address service [bureau] provider in order to obtain a [correct] different address for each intended recipient of an undeliverable mail item.

10. A method for processing returned mail items sent by a subscriber to a recipient, the returned mail items incorporating [machine-readable] encoded identification information [including the identity of the intended recipient], the method comprising the steps of:

collecting the returned mail items at a processing location;

reading the [machine-readable] encoded information from the returned mail items;

electronically gathering updated information including a [correct] different address of the intended recipient; and

electronically transmitting updated information to the subscriber for updating of a subscriber's address database.

11. The method for processing returned mail items of claim 10 wherein the [machine readable] encoded information is placed in an optically encoded barcode [in a return address section of] on each of the plurality of mail items.

16. The method for processing returned mail items of claim 10 wherein the step of reading the [machine-readable] encoded information includes scanning an optically encoded barcode on each item and decoding the barcode to determine [a name and current address] identification information associated with the intended recipient of the item.

18. The method for processing returned mail items of claim 17 further comprising the step of transmitting the generated output file to a mailing address service [bureau] provider in order to obtain a [correct] different address for each intended recipient of an undeliverable mail item.

19. A computer readable medium containing a computer program product for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items, the computer program product comprising:

program instructions that capture optically scanned encoded data including [an] identification information [of the addressee] on each item of undeliverable mail;

program instructions that store the captured optically scanned data in a data file;

program instructions that update the [encoded] stored data to reflect a [correct current] different address of the intended recipient of each item of undeliverable mail; and

program instructions that transmit the updated [encoded] stored data to a subscriber in electronic form to update the address files of the subscriber.

20. The computer program product for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 19 wherein the encoded data is placed in an optically encoded barcode [in a return address section of] on each mail item.

22. The computer program product for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 19 wherein the encoded [data] identification information includes a name and current address associated with the intended recipient of the mail item.

23. The computer program product for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 19 further comprising program instructions that transmit the stored data file electronically to a mailing address service [bureau] provider in order to obtain a [correct] different address for each intended recipient of an undeliverable mail item.

24. A system for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items comprising:

[a mail transport device for conveying the plurality of undeliverable items and sorting the undeliverable mail items into a plurality of bins;]

a scanner for reading [an] optically encoded data [field] that includes [an] identification information [of the addressee] on each item of undeliverable mail;

[an application server] a processor for operation of a computer program [product] for capturing the [scanned] identification information in the encoded data and writing the [scanned data] identification information into a data file; and

[an undeliverable mail items] a database for storing the data file containing identification information.

25. The system for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 24 wherein the computer program [product] includes instructions that update the stored [scanned] data in the data file with a [correct current] different address associated with each of the undeliverable mail items.

26. The system for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 24 wherein the computer program [product] includes instructions that deliver the updated stored [scanned] data to a subscriber in electronic form for use in updating the address files of the subscriber.

27. The system for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 24 wherein the optically encoded data [field] contains a two-dimensional bar code.

28. The method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 1, wherein the step of processing encoded data comprises the steps of:

storing the encoded data in a data file;

updating the stored data to correct the address of each intended recipient of the items of undeliverable mail; and

delivering the updated data to a subscriber for use in updating the mailing address files of the subscriber.

29. The method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 1, wherein the identification information encoded on each mail item includes a name and current address associated with an intended recipient of the mail item.

30. The method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 2, wherein the optically encoded bar code is placed on either the front side or the back side of each mail item.

31. The method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 2, wherein the optically encoded bar code is placed in a return address section on each of the plurality of mail items.

32. The method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 11, wherein the optically encoded bar code is placed on either the front side or the back side of each mail item.

33. The method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 11, wherein the optically encoded bar code is placed in a return address section on each of the plurality of mail items.

34. The method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 20, wherein the optically encoded bar code is placed on either the front side or the back side of each mail item.

35. The method for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 20, wherein the optically encoded bar code is placed in a return address section on each of the plurality of mail items.

36. The system for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 24, further comprising a mail transport device for conveying the plurality of undeliverable items and sorting the undeliverable mail items into a plurality of bins.

37. The system for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 24, wherein the scanner is a hand-held device.

38. The system for processing a plurality of undeliverable mail items of claim 24, wherein the scanner is a mixed media optical character recognition (MLOCR) device.